

STATEMENT

FROM REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES B. RANGEL

Ranking Democrat, Committee on Ways and Means

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REP. RANGEL: THIS MEDICARE "DEAL" IS BAD FOR SENIORS

It is not that this so-called "deal" on Medicare legislation does too little for too few. That on its own would be reason to oppose it. We are so strongly against this bill because it would spell disaster for millions of seniors that depend on Medicare.

This bill does exactly the opposite of what its supposed to do. Instead of providing seniors a guaranteed prescription drug benefit, the bill provides no drug coverage until 2006 and then, the average senior would only be covered through August while they pay premiums for the entire year. Instead of providing coverage for more seniors, it would take away coverage for more than 2 million people with retiree benefits currently provided by their employers. Instead of helping poor seniors better afford their medicines, it would raise costs for those with the lowest incomes. Instead of strengthening traditional Medicare, the bill ends Medicare as we know it by turning it into a voucher program for millions and laying the groundwork to shift more non-drug costs to seniors.

This bill is good for the big drug companies that will not have to worry about lowering their skyrocketing drug prices. It even prohibits the HHS Secretary from negotiating better prices for seniors and taxpayers. The bill is good for the private insurance industry - including the insurance companies that AARP partners with - because they will now be subsidized by the government to entice seniors into HMOs. The bill is good for Washington insiders and

lobbyists who have swarmed around the special interest provisions in this bill.

The bill is bad for American seniors. That's why Republicans are jamming it through Congress before seniors can learn about it. But I tell you this: maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon America's seniors will find out that they were betrayed. And when they do, they will hold accountable those who pretended to help them while they were undermining Medicare. It will be judgement day.

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